

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
State Military Reserve
9800 Goethe Road - P. O. Box 269101
Sacramento, California 95826-9101**

CASR-C

24 February 2005

TO: The Men and Women of the Basic Orientation Course ("BOC")
Class February 2005.

SUBJECT: **Why We Serve**

1. As you conclude a difficult yet rewarding BOC training, you might ask yourselves "Why do we serve?" Let me tell you about my day today. It could help provide some answers.
2. A Company of the 579th Engineer Battalion returned home to Petaluma today and the DAG Army, BG Combs, asked me to participate with him in the welcoming home ceremonies.
3. A Company has served as infantry in Iraq for 14 months. They have had a higher casualty rate than any other California National Guard unit --- more than one in five, including three fatalities. A Bronze Star was awarded to a soldier today. And the Company has been awarded 20 Purple Hearts, including one for a soldier today with a device indicating he had been wounded in combat two times. So it is also one of our most decorated Companies.
4. One injured soldier who sent his best wishes, and apologized for not making the ceremonies, was SSG Nevins. SSG Nevins is currently in Walter Reed, learning how to walk with a prosthesis for the left foot he lost to a roadside IED in Iraq.
5. It seemed like the whole town turned out for the homecoming. The Mayor, City Council, Firemen, Highway Patrol and Petaluma PD, including the Chief of Police --- who is in our SDF. Lots of families. Kids, kids, kids. Of course vets, VFW, American Legion. And lots of plain grateful citizens.
6. The Armory looked great --- it had been decorated by Family Support and soldiers families and friends. The walls were lined with cases of wine for the soldiers donated by local wineries. The Band played. The Bagpiper piped. The tension of waiting increased. And then the bus arrived.

7. An American Flag came out of the bus door first. It was followed by about 50 soldiers met by their families and loved ones. Some were seeing their infant children for the first time. BG Combs and I shook every hand, welcomed every soldier home, said how proud we were of them, and thanked each.
8. During the formal ceremonies, BG Combs introduced me and spoke at length about the services performed by the SDF in training, mobilization and demobilization. He stated that this support was highly professional and vital. The cheers from the returning soldiers were spontaneous and heartfelt!
9. I was given the coin of the 579th for excellence, which I accepted on behalf of the SDF. (By the way, it contains the engraving "One Weekend a Month My Ass".)
10. After the ceremony, many of the soldiers came up to me to thank the SDF for the mission critical training we had provided for them, in particular by SATT. The retuning Company Commander couldn't say enough about the professional way our soldiers helped in every aspect of his Company's mobilization and demobilization.
11. Imagine soldiers just back from Iraq, seeing their families and loved ones for the first time in 14 months, who nevertheless made the effort to seek me out to thank the SDF!
12. The men and women of the SDF with whom you are serving, and now you, are doing important stuff. Each of you can make a difference. As you finish your BOC, each of you will carry on and expand our record for outstanding and professional support. The thanks and recognition I proudly accepted on your behalf today are some reasons why we serve.

I wish you a rewarding career in the State Defense Force.

THOMAS A. SWIDLER
Brigadier General (CA)
Commanding